

Meeting on Leaks

I asked for this meeting to discreetly convey some assurances and cautions to those people in the Agency who you think should have them.

I like the way we've been working and the spirit I feel around here.

-- Our intelligence collection is at a high in quality and quantity.

-- Our analysis and estimates are more comprehensive, timely and relevant than they've been in a long time.



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-- The Soviet intelligence services are taking the worst pasting they've had in a long time--over 100 expulsions, arrests or exposures in less than half a year.

-- We have already gone a long way in rebuilding to overcome the 50% decline in people and the 40% decline in funding we suffered in the seventies and we are being supported to continue that buildup in 1984 and beyond.

-- We have gotten the Identities legislation to protect our people and the Intelligence Committees have introduced legislation to exempt our operational files from the Freedom of Information Act and believe we can get that relief this year.

-- That, briefly, is the good news.

I called you together to talk about some bad news and what we can do about it. There is a breakdown, I hope a temporary one, in Congressional and media responsibility and in discipline in the Executive Branch and possibly to some extent in our own ranks.

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-- Over the last few days, irresponsibility rose to new heights with The New York Times quoting a member of the House Intelligence Committee as saying: "The CIA always lies to us," and yesterday reporting that I and Assistant Secretary of State Enders had predicted that the anti-Sandinistas had a good chance to overthrow the Nicaraguan government by the end of the year.

I don't want to pick a fight with the Congress or the media, but I'm not willing to sit still and let this Agency and all of us be abused and falsely traduced. That's why I put out a denial of the false story in yesterday's Times. It said:

"There is nothing in the record of the Congressional briefings which remotely resembles the story in The New York Times."

I should have added that the record contains much that flatly contradicted that story.

The Times was forced to put my denial on the first page this morning and their story floundered around in a pitiful effort to justify their original story in the face of confirmation by several Congressmen that no such prediction had ever been made.

In response to the outrageous statement made, according to the Times, by a Democratic member of the House Intelligence Committee that the CIA always lies to us, I have written this letter to Chairman Boland and will follow up with a letter to each member of the committee.

READ LETTER ATTACHED

Fortunately, the Chairmen and most of the members of the two Committees are as indignant as we are about the loose talking of some of their colleagues. The two Chairmen have expressed themselves on this in no uncertain terms.

The Nicaraguan government has conducted a very skillful disinformation program and this, together with distortions in the media and in various public statements, have generated a false picture of the Agency's activities. The nature of our work requires us to accept inaccurate and unfair blame and criticism without public explanation.

But since much of this comes from Congressional sources, I will put on the closed record of the Committees a comprehensive refutation of all explicit or implied misrepresentations about our activities which have been leaked into the media.

I believe most of the members of the Intelligence Committees will welcome this. We would not maintain their respect or be true to ourselves if we failed to challenge the misrepresentations which have been spewed out into the public discourse on Central America.

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Let me now turn to my responsibility for protecting sources and methods against damage from intentional and unintentional leaks. I believe that leaking is rampant among policy elements of the Executive Branch and that it is limited and infrequent in the intelligence agencies. But, in order to fight the damage from leaking throughout the government, which we must, it is essential that we keep our own house in order. That requires that those of us in this room constantly reaffirm and enforce the security rules here. It requires that I use every authority that I have to send the message that we are serious in insisting that security requirements be observed. This will meet resistance but the fight must be made on all levels.

This week I am sending three messages addressed to specific losses of sources and methods we have suffered very recently.

First, every recipient of the National Intelligence Daily will be asked to inform us of the procedure followed in his office to assure that the NID is read only by the authorized recipient, is not copied and is returned as required. Anyone who does not comply by 15 June will no longer receive the NID.

Second, a record has been kept of the NIDs which have not been returned as required. Return will be demanded. We will also begin to ask questions about those which have been tampered with in a way which suggests copying.

Third, a procedure will be established for all officials likely to learn of an imminent media report likely to compromise a source to notify our Office of External Affairs. That office will get me, if it can't get me it will get John, and if it can't get John it will act itself. The action will be to promptly call the appropriate official at the relevant media institution and persuade him to withhold publication or modify the

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language as necessary to protect the source. We have not been adequately organized for this. Last week a policy official was told at 4:30 in the afternoon about a story to be broadcast on the evening news.

We were not told about it until a short time before air time, too late to do anything. If we had been informed even a half-hour before the broadcast, I am confident the story could have been held or modified in a way designed to protect the source. This will not always work but I have had success in this at least as often as not and I explored the issue with enough media officials to be quite sure that we can educate them to be consistently receptive to pleas for source protection if we organize ourselves to act promptly and effectively.

That leads me to a few final comments on dealing with the media. Whether to talk to them at all is a judgment call. There is usually the risk that contact can be used as a confirmation and turned against us. That requires weighing the risk against the potential benefit. When it is clear that a story will be written, a judgment call is needed on whether to submit to an interview in order to correct or respond to false and damaging statements or to stay away and let the reporter do his worst. That call has to be made on the basis of a judgment about the reliability and integrity of the writer and the nature of the story being written. Except for very significant and potentially damaging stories, my tendency is to stay away. I will talk only on the understanding that what I say is to be used for background only and is not to be attributed to me, or a senior Administration official or an intelligence official. Nothing is to be quoted unless I specifically approve it. So far, that commitment has been broken only once.

There are many reasons why as an organization we need to minimize publicity but cannot afford to hide from the press.

We need to maintain the discipline that there will be no unauthorized discussions with the press. I am quite sure that some reporters who cover intelligence have a handful of people in the Intelligence Community with whom they can talk. Some of them brag about this. They call for seemingly innocent discussions or questions and piece together a speculation or a confirmation. It's this kind of thing which you must warn your people about, watch for and act on.

There remains the problem of chronic leaking and explaining by policy officials. An interagency study under the lead of Justice produced a sensible program to mitigate if not fully control these leaks. It languished in the White House for a year. It finally came out and is slowly being implemented. Several specific leaks are under investigation. One leaker was caught and confessed a couple of weeks back and our polygraph working on one of his office staff confirmed the passing of a classified document to a reporter. One of the reasons I want a more aggressive approach to this problem on our part is to develop more clout and credibility for our insistence on more use of the polygraph and greater discipline elsewhere in our government.

I've discussed this difficult and delicate subject candidly and at some length because I need your cooperation. I believe you are entitled to fully understand what we're up against and I want any criticism and suggestions you have.

I'd like to have your comments, suggestions and questions.